



NEWS: Cutting edge

— Building robots, programming computers and solving design problems are not subjects every high school student has the opportunity to pursue. But since adopting the Project Lead the Way program in 2005, Pendleton students get to do just that.

Project Lead the Way is nationwide in scope and was initiated by the Rochester Institute of Technology in New York. The purpose of the program is to encourage high school students to become interested in pursuing engineering as a career because the United States is lagging behind other countries in the field. “I think the biggest benefit to the program is just finding a career,” said Jay Allor, sophomore. “When I was a freshman I had no idea what I wanted to be and now I know what I want to be.”

Allor is leaning toward agricultural engineering, but is also considering civil or mechanical engineering — all careers he knew little about before entering the pre-engineering classes.

Ellie McCardwell, also a sophomore, began Project Lead the Way classes after enjoying her Technical Education classes in middle school. If she chooses to pursue an engineering field, she is most interested in the biomedical branch.

Martin Klipsch, coordinator of the program and teacher of some of the courses, believes that program is accomplishing its goal.

“There really wasn’t anything there for them until this program,” he said. “We could tell them to take math, take science, and maybe a drafting class. Now they get to see what’s behind it, and they get to do more with engineering. They do research within the various fields of engineering so they can see exactly what a mechanical engineer does or an electrical engineer. And it’s more focused.”

Currently PHHS offers Introduction to Engineering Design, Principles of Engineering, and Digital Electronics. As time moves forward, Klipsch hopes to add more classes and eventually get the math and science departments involved.

Klipsch and fellow Project Lead the Way teacher, Brandon Jessie, were required to take specialized training courses to become certified instructors. Klipsch commented that the new topics have renewed his fervor for teaching.

“I’ve been teaching here 12 years. It really got me fired up and excited about teaching again,” he added excitedly. “It’s something new and it has my interest too. I wish they had it when I was in high school.”

This excitement carries over to the participating students, who are coming from a cross-section of the population. The pre-engineering courses are drawing both the high-level academic students and the traditional drafting students.

“We have the valedictorian of the sophomore class in one of these classes right now,” said Klipsch.

“This student probably never would have been in our hallway (Technical Education) if not for Project Lead the Way. We’re getting to see kids that never would have taken our classes otherwise — which is great.”

Students are recommending these classes to others, even to those who aren’t sure they want to pursue engineering.

“I like the teachers a lot and the material is good, too,” said Tyler Kuhl, senior. “They are a lot more educational and they are more hands-on.”

“The whole program is organized and spelled out for you so that it’s easy to learn — and it’s very hands-on,” said Jessica Shetterley, junior. “It’s fun, too. They make it interesting.”

Over a hundred students are currently enrolled in Project Lead the Way courses, and graduates have written their teachers to thank them for the head start.

“We’ve had e-mails come back from students at Purdue and Rose Hulman that have commented on the

way it really helped them with their freshman year and in their classes,” said Klipsch. “So it’s helping at that level and I think it’s teaching the kids what engineering is all about.”

The courses also offer dual credit at Ivy Tech, IUPUI, and the Purdue Lafayette campuses, allowing high school graduates to begin their higher education with college credits already under their belts.

Some students are drawn to this collegiate advantage, some are drawn to the societal advantage, and some are just drawn to the novelty of building robots.

“They seemed like cool classes. I thought I’d try it,” said Mathew George, sophomore, who added his favorite part is designing on the computers. “I do like math and hands-on material.”

“I wanted to do something that would help the world and I figure being an engineer will help,” said Allor “These classes are fun and they’ve really influenced my life a lot.”

Other area high schools that participated in Project Lead the Way are Shenandoah, Hamilton Southeastern, Greenfield Central, New Palestine, and Eastern Hancock.

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